



LOWELL SCHOOL COMMITTEE
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Equity & Access
Subcommittee Meeting

Tuesday, February 2, 2021
Zoom – Virtual Meeting
6:30 p.m.

Subcommittee Members Present:	Chairperson Jackie Doherty, Hilary Clark and Robert Hoey
School Committee Members Present:	Mayor Leahy, Mike Dillon and Connie Martin
School Department Personnel Present:	Ms. Phillips, Chief Equity & Engagement Officer Dr. Duda, Coordinator, Family Resource Center Mr. Descoteaux, Transportation Director

This meeting is being held remotely in accordance with the Governor of Massachusetts' March 12, 2020 order suspending certain provisions of the Open Meeting Law G.L. 30A, Section 20.

Chairperson Doherty called the meeting to order at 6:35 p.m. The following agenda item was discussed:

- 1. School Assignment Policy**
- 2. Elementary & School Enrollment Data**

Chairperson Doherty opened the meeting and asked Ms. Phillips to address the Subcommittee. Ms. Phillips stated that the district's fundamental commitments to equity are as follows:

- Eliminate the racial, ethnic and linguistic achievement and opportunity gaps among all students.
- Provide equitable funding and resources among the district's diverse schools.
- Engage all families with courtesy, dignity, respect and cultural understanding.

Ms. Phillips stated that the desired outcomes is for all students to attend schools that are reflective of Lowell's rich diversity, for students and families to have satisfaction in their school assignment that meets the needs as learners and community members and that all students have access to the wide range of quality services and programs across schools.

She stated that currently we have fifteen (15) elementary programs that are organized into two (2) zones with city-wide options which are Zone one (1) and Zone (2) with a feeder pattern. Currently, students are assigned to a school in Kindergarten through Grade 8 based on space availability, sibling preference, ethnicity balance and place of residence. The district also has a lottery in place if there are more pre-registration requests than seats available. She stated that any registration applications received after the pre-registration period will be placed on a waitlist on a first-come first-served basis where open seats are not available within a requested grade and school.

Ms. Phillips spoke about the limitations of the data. She stated that the district's data is constantly being updated as students either move in or out of the district or between schools. The data Ms. Phillips provided, is a snapshot of the current enrollment, however, she stated this will keep changing. She stated that Brazilian students will be identified within the "white, non-Hispanic" student group, however, many have linguistic needs that differ from the English-dominant, white non-Hispanic students who are counted within this racial/ethnic grouping. She stated that the data presented includes assignments of students in city-wide schools by proximity to school when in reality citywide schools have special factors, such as transportation and magnet programs, which currently impact their school enrollment.

The report included the following data:

- Overall K-4 Demographics
- Elementary Data Disaggregated by Race/Ethnicity
- English Learners Demographics
- English Learner Race/Ethnicity Assignment Data
- McKinney-Vento – Homeless Services Student Demographics
- McKinney-Vento Disaggregated Data
- Economic Demographic Data
- Economic Data Disaggregated Demographic Data of Students by School

Ms. Phillips then spoke about the school assignment findings shown below based on review of the K-4 data below:

1. As pertains to the Voluntary Desegregation Plan, Zone 1 and Zone 2 fall within the racial balance as of 62% - 82% minority student enrollment (targeted 72% with +/- 10% above or below the 72%) for the broader elementary school population in both scenarios (choice assignment vs proximity to school assignment).
2. As relates to individual school racial balance (not a requirement of the Desegregation plan), two (2) school's individual racial balance are outside the parameters set in the Voluntary Desegregation Plan.

3. As relates to students identified for McKinney Vento services, some schools may have higher percentages of McKinney Vento students due to the following factors:
 - a. Location of shelters
 - b. Socio economics of the neighborhood
 - c. Doubled-up families
4. As relates to economic data, some school's economic balance will exceed the district average of 50% student population identified as high needs based on direct certification, (replaced free and reduced price lunch data process).

Ms. Phillips provided K-4 data analysis and learnings as shown below:

- Given the large percentage of students of color in the district, most schools will remain racially diverse (as defined by the voluntary desegregation plan) regardless of placement by choice or placement driven by proximity to a student's home.
- Facility capacity (under enrollment and over enrollment) will be a challenge in some neighborhoods and schools. Thus single school assignment based on proximity would exacerbate this problem; whereas clusters of schools and more compact zones could alleviate over and under enrollment in schools with capacity challenges.
- A two mile walk zone may be "walk-able" by the state's definition. However, it impacted family's ability to accept in person learning assignments in the absence of transportation, notably English Learners who were given priority status within the return to school lottery but didn't qualify for transportation services (as compared to Special Education students and McKinney Vento students with transportation options stipulated within federal law). Thus, equitable school assignment would be better served through the district's transportation policy versus state law.
- As pertains to English Learners, ELs are not evenly placed across the district.
- Language groups vary by schools
- The concentration of language/ethnic/racial groups within neighborhoods may impact placement/school data:
 - ❖ Acre - Latino/Hispanic and Asian
 - ❖ Back Central - Latino/Hispanic and low incident groups
 - ❖ Belvidere - White
 - ❖ Centerville - Latino/Hispanic, White and low incident language groups
 - ❖ Downtown - Latino/Hispanic and low incident language groups
 - ❖ Highlands - Asian and White
 - ❖ Lower Belvidere - Latino/Hispanic
 - ❖ Lower Highlands – Asian
 - ❖ Pawtucketville - Indian and White
 - ❖ Sacred Heart - Brazilian/Portuguese, Latino/Hispanic and White
 - ❖ South Lowell - Brazilian/Portuguese
- There are currently no self-contained SLIFE/newcomer programs at the elementary level. Students are placed based on availability of seats and ESL staffing.
- As of today the district has 254 students in its shelter system. These students tend to largely live within a couple of neighborhoods (Centerville and the Acre). To that end, the number of McKinney-Vento students would significantly increase at the Bartlett, Murkland, and Greenhalge. Conversely, the number of McKinney-Vento students would dramatically decrease at McAvinnue, Pawtucketville, Reilly, and Washington.

- McKinney-Vento shelter families, in particular, have no say in their residential placement. Therefore, implementing an equitable placement protocol based on proximity to one's domicile would require intentional policy language providing flexibilities for inclusion of other factors that would determine school assignment of a child living in a shelter.
- It must also be acknowledged that students in shelters may be relocated to a new shelter assignment at any time through no fault of their own. Whether in the shelter system or not, and especially during the current COVID pandemic, the McKinney-Vento population tends to be transient, so the concept of a school in proximity to their shelter holds less significance for them. Many of these families will relocate several times during a student's enrollment period. (Due to Government implementation of shelter living mandates)
- Transportation flexibilities must also be considered for this group of students. Most McKinney-Vento families do not have their own transportation and school attendance can be impacted by the length of a walk zone (ie the recent 2 mile walk zone) especially where parents may have to "transport" multiple school aged children in the AM and PM.

She stated that there will be ongoing data analysis and emerging policy considerations. She spoke about examples from other districts relating to policies to better integrate student populations, as well as select general findings on impacts of racial or economic segregation of student populations.

The subcommittee had a lengthy conversation and asked that some concrete proposals as well as newcomer proposals be presented at the next Subcommittee meeting. They asked how broad the assignments will be and are interested in curriculum driven programs.

Ms. Clark made a motion to accept the report as a report of progress; seconded by Mr. Hoey. 3 yeas APPROVED

Ms. Clark made a motion to adjourn at 8:00 p.m.; seconded by Mr. Hoey. 3 yeas APPROVED

Respectfully submitted,



Latifah Phillips, Chief Equity & Engagement Officer for Dr. Joel Boyd, Superintendent and Secretary, Lowell School Committee

LP/mes